



# God is for Equality

*“All people made in his image”*

## INTRODUCTION

“When I first came to St Aldates, I was a nervous postgraduate student looking for a place to call home. I had just arrived in the city for a few weeks--my first time away from my country without a foreseeable return flight home. Even though I had no family or friends in the UK, and was starting to find my ways about the city, I longed to find a place where people might know my name.

Through a series of Holy Spirit orchestrated events, I found myself at St Aldates on a Wednesday Night for a Postgraduate Event. I got put at a table with about seven other postgraduates, some from Australia, some from South Korea, others from Texas, while some from a little outside the Oxford ring road.

I had never met so many people from around the world as I did at this moment. Yet as we--this motley group of strangers--broke bread, prayed, and worshipped together, what it meant to be one in Christ took on new meaning. Each of us had unique characteristics, experiences, and cultures that we brought to the table, literally. Yet we were one. As we discussed the Word

together, and shared testimonies of how God our Father worked in our lives, I realised that I had brothers and sisters in places where I had no biological family. And this made all the difference in a foreign place.”

## ICE BREAKER

**Did you know?** 45% of households in the UK had a weekly income of below £600 (before tax) on average, in the 3 years to March 2020. Black households were most likely out of all ethnic groups to have a weekly income under £600.<sup>9</sup>

**How do you respond to this statistic?**  
**How would you define the term equality?**

## REFLECTION

We have reached the halfway point of the small group resource. In the first two weeks, you have explored the overarching concept of diversity within God’s people. You explored God’s heart for the nations, and have discussed the diversity of experiences within the nations. In the following two weeks, you see how Christ himself became our peace, reconciling, unifying, and bringing justice to the nations in his name.

### ***Read Genesis 1:24-28 aloud***

Genesis 1 details the well-known creation story where God created the heavens and the earth and all that inhabit it. On the sixth day, God created living creatures and mankind. In verse 26, God says let’s make mankind in “our image, in our likeness” so that they might rule over all living creatures. Creating both male and female, God blesses them and tells them to be fruitful, and to fill and subdue the earth.

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<sup>9</sup>UK Government, [Household Income, Ethnicity Facts and Figures](#)

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect on these questions:

- In verse 26, who is God talking to when God says “Let us make mankind in our image and likeness? What might this indicate about the nature of God?
- What do you think it means for men and women to be made in the image and likeness of this ‘us’/ triune God?
- What difference does it make knowing that all people were created in the image of a triune God?

### **RFJ Remarks**

The ‘us’ might refer to the triune nature of the Lord. That is, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As God creates humankind, God speaks to God’s own being, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We all know that God created humanity in God’s image and likeness. This is a profound truth that should not be glossed over. Each human shares a universal bond, common worth and dignity,<sup>10</sup> being made in the image of God. Our shared foundation in God makes each of us equal no matter our nation, tribe, or tongue. And like our God who is three in one, (each person in the trinity holding its own unique nature) we, God’s people, are many, with our own unique cultures/ natures yet held together as one through Jesus.

### ***Read Ephesians 2: 11- 22 aloud***

In the following scriptures Paul’s explanation of God’s relationship towards the Jews and the Gentiles provides a helpful parallel to ground the discussion of contemporary racial dynamics within the church.

In this passage from Ephesians, Paul elaborates on how the Gentiles have been brought into the Covenant by the blood of Christ. In the old testament, God establishes a covenant with the Jews first in Genesis through Abram, choosing him and his descendants to bless all people on earth (Genesis 12:2-3). The Jews were God’s chosen people. They were “entrusted with the very words of God” (Rom 3:2) such as the commandments, and revelations from the prophets throughout the Old

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<sup>10</sup> The Archbishops’ Council 2010, Affirming Our Common Humanity

testament. Jesus, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Col 1:17) was a Jew. Christ came to the lost sheep of Israel to preach the gospel first (Mat 15:24). Within Ephesians, Paul, a Jew explains that his specific calling from the Lord is to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Eph 3:8).

The Gentiles were anyone who was not Jewish by birth. For instance, later in this resource, you will meet a Gentile man named Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who came to know Christ through Peter, a Jewish man. By birth, the Gentile were foreigners “to the covenant of the promise without hope, without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). But in Christ, Gentiles are brought near by his blood. Jesus became their peace, drawing them into relationship with the Father and with each other in one new humanity.

Although the dynamics between the Jews and the Gentiles are not the same as those between racial groups in our modern times, a helpful analogy can be drawn to root our discussion of equality within the Kingdom of God. The invitation to salvation extended through Christ to the Gentiles, foreigners to the gospel communicates God’s heart for equality. No one is excluded from salvation. While bloodlines had served to distinguish God’s relationship with Israel, in Christ all people, Jew, Gentile, slave or free are one (Gal 3:28). Equality of all people is central to the gospel and to fully understanding the precious gift that Jesus Christ offers to us. Upon this foundation, we learn how to treat, see and love one another. Allow this principle truth to contextualise the following discussion of race.

Divide into groups of three or four and consider a few of these questions:

- What things stand out to you from this passage? What words or phrases are you most drawn to?
- What according to Paul characterises the time when we were separated from Christ (v. 12)?
- In verses 14-16 Jesus is described as our peace, who made the two groups one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. What is the barrier and dividing wall of hostility?
- How might this passage be applicable to us now?
- How do we practically live through the peace of Christ with groups of people we were once in conflict with?
- How is our church living inside or outside of this peace? Explain and discuss with one another.

# CURRENT ISSUE

Race and cultural differences are beautiful. Yet historically and currently, the very same things that distinguish us threaten to divide us. One example of this is the racial and cultural divisions within the UK church. In *Ghost Ship*, A.D.A France-Williams describes that “the 42 dioceses in the Church of England, which includes the Diocese of Europe, are at different levels of readiness for the task of creating a church that is represented by all and produced by all. There is a ghost ship of vessels that the Church of England is inviting people of colour to join, many are not ship shape. They look good from the outside but they are overcrowded, and the black and brown clergy are shoved below-deck as second or third class crew” (27)<sup>11</sup>. This harrowing picture of the Church of England reminds us that even within our own church doors people, from pew to pulpit, experience prejudice and racism that stands counter to the gospel we preach.

Against the backdrop of our Scriptures for this week, we clearly see how the church has fallen short of the truth of God’s love for all people. But in Christ, we can live more fully in peace with our brothers and sisters. As A.D.A France-Williams contends, a church that is represented and produced by all, will in effect reflect the equality that God desires amongst all people, and will bring closer to home the redemptive vision of ‘Kingdom Come’, where peace reigns, and where we gather as one. God’s purpose was to create one new humanity out of the two distinct groups in himself. This equality is not flimsy, or cheap. It does not completely eradicate the unique backgrounds we hold. Nor is it really attainable outside of Christ. Rather, in our acceptance of Christ, we are drawn near to the Father, and he holds us all together in one Spirit. While we may be far from seeing this equality in the church in some regards, in Christ we can take steps to make sure all people are loved, valued, and seen within our communities. Our peacekeeping and our being together is ultimately to make His name great.

*“I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” - John 17:23*

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<sup>11</sup>A.D.A France-Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England*, p.27

# RESPONSE

We are called to live out God's heart for equality and diversity. What would it look like to live out God's heart for all people being made equal in his sight? What ways do you need to seek the Holy Spirit to shape this? How do we break bread with people from nations that were once hostile to our nations? What would it look like to celebrate and acknowledge diversity in your life, at home, at work, within family, friends, church?

# PRAYER AND MINISTRY

- Invite the Holy Spirit to search and know your heart and your thoughts. Ask the Holy Spirit to point out any ways that you have fallen short in thought, word or deed to live reconciled with one another.
- Pray for God to speak to you about how to live out God's heart for equality amongst those around us through our call to love our neighbours as ourselves.
- Pray for those working towards racial equality within communities, policy making, churches and organisations.

# ACTION

This week:

- Consider a way in which you could better get to know a brother or sister in church, a work colleague or a neighbour for instance. Why not extend hospitality, or invite someone for a walk or a coffee?
- Consider what you might learn about and from one another